DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 259 641 HE 018 522

AUTHOR McCarty, Donald J.; Reyes, Pedro
TITLE Models of Institutional Governance: Academic Deans' Decision-Making Patterns as Evidenced by Chairpersons. ASHE 1985 Annual Meeting Paper.
PUB DATE Mar 85
NOTE 23p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education (Chicago, IL, March 15-17, 1985).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Deans; *Administrator Attitudes; Administrator Characteristics; *Decision Making; *Department Heads; *Governance; Higher Education; *Leadership Styles; Models; Role Perception
IDENTIFIERS *ASHE Annual Meeting; Research Universities

ABSTRACT

The perceptions of department chairpersons concerning the leadership roles of academic deans in several schools/colleges of a major research university were identified, based on interviews with 55 chairpersons. The typical chairperson was male, from the College of Letters and Science, had served for about 4 and one-half years, was a full professor, was about 50 years old, and had served at the institution for about 18 years. Of the 55 chairpersons, 49 were not interested in being a dean for such reasons as commitment to teaching and research and the unpleasantness of administrative work. Some respondents offered reasons why other individuals might like to be dean even though they would not, including the opportunity to have influence in shaping the direction of the college. Chairpersons did not conceive of the dean as a powerful and bureaucratic administrative figure. Over 80 percent of the interview protocols pictured the deans as responding primarily to departmental initiatives. Deans were perceived to govern in a variety of ways. While bureaucratic position enabled the dean to follow a rational decision-making model, the traditional doctrine of freedom in teaching and research supported a collegiality model of academic governance. Also relevant was the political governance model, which recognizes inevitable conflicts that arise. (SW)

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ACADEMIC DEANS' DECISION-MAKING PATTERNS AS EVIDENCED BY CHAIRPERSONS

by

Donald J. McCarty
University of Wisconsin-Madison

and

Pedro Reyes
University of Wisconsin-Madison

HE018522

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Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education, Chicago, Illinois, March 15-17, 1985.

ASHE Association for the Study of Higher Education
The George Washington University/One Dupont Circle, Suite 630/Washington, D.C. 20036
(202) 296-2597

This paper was presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education held at the Palmer House Hotel in Chicago, Illinois, March 15-17, 1985. This paper was reviewed by ASHE and was judged to be of high quality and of interest to others concerned with the research of higher education. It has therefore been selected to be included in the ERIC collection of ASHE conference papers.

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Administrative science, as an identifiable and separate field of study in higher education, is relatively immature. Although individual ideas of administration date back for more than two thousand years, organized administrative thought was brought into existence in the late 1800's. Until recently, however, most literature on the subject developed from reflections of practitioners and scholars working in the field of education. For instance, the classical writings, with few exceptions, are not based on empirical research but on judgment supported by individual experience and thoughts of the authors. This is particularly evidenced when the role of the academic dean is the subject of study. Coladarci (1980), while writing on the role of the dean, stated:

> "I found, with Adamic surprise, that the literature addressing this honorable estate could be read comfortably between a late breakfast and an early lunch--and that the dearth in volume was not compensated for by substance." (pg. 125)

We agree. Exhortations, however, should be addressed by formalizing a research agenda to ameliorate the state of the deanship

literature. In this study, we attempt to contribute to this literature by examining the role of the academic dean as perceived by departmental chairpersons. Chairpersons were selected because of their constant interaction with academic deans. Obviously, such an interaction is multivariate; that is, interaction patterns are not uniform and conversational topics vary significantly. However, we assume that theoretically the level of interaction between the chairperson and the academic dean is substantial enough for them to speculate on each other's role. In this case, we were interested in the role of the academic dean. In this paper, then, we examine the literature concerning the role of the academic dean and present our research findings.

The literature concerning the role of the academic dean is divided into two areas: nomothetic allusions to the deanship and anecdotal accounts.

Up until 1970, there was no genuine scholarly interest in the deanship; Cyphert and Zimpher (1976) presented a paper questioning the nature of the deanship in spite of its existence for quite some time (see McGrath, 1938). According to Rudolph (1965), a noted historian, deanships go back to the 1860's. However, no systematic research was at hand until Cyphert and Zimpher compiled an extensive descriptive profile of the dean in American colleges and universities in which they noted that deans tend to be white, middle-aged, Protestant, Democrats, personally secure and perceive themselves as relatively influential. The latter study sparked some interest in studying the deanship. For instance, Dejnozka (1978) and Kapel and Dejnozka (1978) undertook a

comprehensive study of selected role norms regarding the dean of education. Following Getzels' theoretical frame of reference, they found that faculty and departmental chairpersons view the dean's role as primarily an advocate or cheerleader for his or her college rather than as a bureaucratic supervisor. Consequently, the monitoring of departmental activities should be left to members of the faculty. Fullerton (1978), on the other hand, found that two major issues characterized the role of the dean: (1) cultivating and promoting progressive ideas among faculty and students, and (2) concern for the lack of time for personal pursuits. Although Fullerton's study was regionally designed, it does offer interesting ideas about the dean's role in academe. McCarty and Young (1981) further explored the evolution of the dean's role; accordingly, when the dean was perceived as an extension to the presidential role, three fundamental roles were associated with the deanship: (1) considering the ends and means of education, (2) selecting faculty, and (3) preparing budgets. Furthermore, Gould (1964) and Miller (1974) elaborated on these roles to include conflict resolution tasks. Finally, Dill (1980) concluded that with the addition of these latter tasks the dean's role has moved historically from an extension of the presidency to a precarious middle management position.

At the other end of the continuum, we also know that colleges and universities are formal organizations. This means that they are subject to the theories which have been developed to explain the common elements in the functioning of all formal organizations. Central in this theoretical analysis has been the preeminence of bureaucratic characteristics. This classic view, often referred to as the rational model, incorporates a clear division of labor and a visible hierarchy

which can be represented on an organizational chart. Job descriptions are available for every position in the organization; policy manuals list the essential rules and regulations. Operating goals are set by management, and critical decisions are made by key executives at the top of the hierarchy. Decisions are carried into action through orders passed down the line; accountability and feedback about performance are passed up the line.

It is increasingly clear that colleges and universities do not always fit the rational model of organizations; as a result, other governance models are gaining ascendency. For instance, colleges and universities have multiple and vaguely defined goals and an uncertain and non-standardized technology. Both of these attributes make it nearly impossible for a college or university to function as a pure bureaucracy.

Several conceptual models of campus governance have developed in the educational literature over the years. To date, however, most of these models fall short describing, let alone predicting, organizational phenomena concerning educational institutions. Among these models of governance, four are considered in this research effort. The most venerable describes the college or university as a collegium in which the professional authority of faculty is virtually inviolate, and decision-making occurs through consensus between faculty and administration (Parsons, 1947; Millett, 1962; Goodman, 1962). The dean of an academic college in this model functions as first among equals in an organization of professionals (Perkins, 1973).

The second model conceptualizes the college or university as an

academic bureaucracy where participants are hierarchically organized, and most operations are governed by clearly stipulated rules and regulations. Coordination is achieved through a structure of superordination and subordination of persons and groups (Weber, 1947; Hall, 1977). In this model, the dean is more than the first among equals; he or she is a commanding figure who stands at the top of the bureaucratic pyramid and wields much of the organization's power (Etzioni, 1975).

A third and more recently developed model depicts colleges and universities as political systems that have powerful organizational actors and dominant coalitions that intentionally exert their respective ends on organization activities (Karpik, 1972). According to this model, conflict is the normal state of affairs, and the dean's role is to function as a mediator (Baldridge, 1971, 1977).

The fourth and most provocative model is that developed by Cohen and March (1974)--the garbage can model which pictures the university organization as a "collection of choices looking for problems, issues and feelings looking for decision situations in which they may be aired, solutions looking for issues to which they might be the answer, and decision-makers looking for work" (pg. 81). In short, colleges and universities are organized anarchies, and the dean's role is to keep track of useful solutions and to pursue them in whatever context they happen to occur.

While the accuracy of these descriptive models might be disputed, their existence does suggest that there is substantial lack of agreement about the dominant governance patterns of American colleges and

universities. Contrast this situation with most business and governmental enterprises where there is little question that rational, bureaucratic modes prevail.

Purpose and Methodology

The main objective of this study was to examine the patterns of perceived management and leadership roles of academic deans held by departmental chairpersons in several schools and colleges of a major research university.

Although research evidence is limited, the normative and theoretical statements available in the literature suggest that the collegial model may be the predominant mode of operation in such an institution (Epstein, 1974).

Quantitative methods have long been the dominant method for studying organizations--including institutions of higher education--emphasizing mostly comparative and structural approaches. These studies rely on easily gathered measures of input and output, on short uncomplicated responses to questionnaires, or on closed-ended interviews. Subtle interpretations of events are not obtained in this fashion.

Some of the models presented above describe organizational behavior that is not officially legitimate. How colleges and universities really function is generally hidden from public recognition, and qualitative methods are needed to discover these kinds of data. What behavior actually takes place is more easily discovered and explored with methods

that involve observation and open-ended interviews which elicit descriptions of events and allow the interviewer to probe for details and for perceived motives not only of the interviewee but of others with whom he or she has to deal. In this study, we used the naturalistic paradigm (see Guba and Lincoln, 1981; Bogdan and Taylor, 1975) to conduct this investigation.

This study was conducted in a large public university of over 44,000 undergraduate and graduate students; it is one of the leading research universities in the world. Its graduate departments rank very high reputationally. The institution has approximately 120 departments. These departments differ greatly in size; some departments consist of a half dozen faculty members, others of ten times that number. The emphasis on teaching, research, and service missions varies among departments, even more than their size. Some teach hundreds of undergraduates, while others teach graduate students exclusively. A few support their operation almost entirely through grants from and contracts with federal and research agencies; others rely almost exclusively on instructional funding.

The diversity of function accounts for considerable variation in the manner in which departments handle their own governance, but there are some characteristics of operation shared by all the departments.

The administrative structure of this university consists of twelve schools and colleges that have been established by statute. Some of these are large and complex; others are more homogeneous and operate as large departments do in many respects. Each is headed by a dean who is a tenured faculty member appointed through the search and screen

process. The governing principle is that the dean should be in and of the faculty, not above and beyond it.

This study was designed and carried out during the academic year 1983-84. The study was planned with the assumption that, as in other settings, perceptions of departmental chairpersons would vary depending on particular colleges within the university, the personalities and governing styles of academic deans, and the predispositions of the departmental chairpersons themselves. Questions asked did not concern what the dean was supposed to do, but what he or she actually did to help departmental chairpersons with their work. It was left to departmental chairpersons to volunteer information about what else was important.

Fifty-five departmental chairpersons were selected randomly from among the 120 possibles; this meant that certain colleges, like Law and Pharmacy, were excluded since they did not have departmental subdivisions. A few departmental chairpersons are in fact heads or directors of substantial program units (i.e., Journalism, Music, Library Science). Each departmental chairperson was interviewed in his or her office for approximately one hour. A semi-structured, open-ended interview schedule was used. All interviews were taped and transcribed into separate protocols.

Nearly all of the subjects originally contacted agreed to participate. A few were reluctant because they felt that the proposed interview was a trespass of their time; eventually, under persuasion, most of these individuals finally agreed to participate. Only two

subjects refused outright, and they were replaced by others from similar disciplines.

Interviews yielded approximately 550 pages of field notes. The investigators sorted, coded, and analyzed the interview data. Each protocol was read twice, first for feeling tone, and secondly, to underline key words and phrases. Dominant themes were then extracted for inclusion in the discussion of findings.

In analyzing the data, we had to make judgments about the reliability of the various respondents. The interviews yielded many sorts of data, such as descriptions, opinions, explanations, facts, errors, and possibly falsehoods. Throughout the protocols, however, there appeared to be a remarkable willingness on the part of the respondents to tell the story accurately, as they saw it.

The final sample included 55 departmental chairpersons. Of this total, 50 were male and 5 were female. Almost all were full professors; only 2 were associate professors. Forty-one of the departmental chairpersons obtained their doctorates at other universities, while 14 chairpersons had obtained their doctorates in the research university itself. Departmental chairpersons had served an average of 4.4 years; the range of service was from 1 year to 21 years. The average age of the departmental chairpersons was 50.1 years; the youngest was 39 and the oldest was 66. Departmental chairpersons had served an average of 17.8 years at the research university, with a range from 3 years to 43 years. An interesting statistic was the fact that 25 of the chairpersons had never served at another university as a faculty member, while 30 had served elsewhere. Twenty-eight of the chairpersons were

from the College of Letters and Science, 11 were from the College of Agriculture, 8 were from the School of Education, 4 were from the School of Medicine, 2 were from the School of Business, 1 was from the College of Engineering, and 1 was from the College of Family Resources and Consumer Sciences.

The profile for chairpersons that emerged for this institution is instructive. It is a narrow profile. The typical departmental chairperson is male, from the College of Letters and Science, has served for about four and one-half years, is a full professor, is about 50 years old, and has served at the institution for approximately 18 years. Young and inexperienced individuals are just not selected for this role in this research university.

Passing mention should be made that although hundreds of man-hours have been spent codifying the faculty rules, the traditions and practices in some departments are quite different from the rest of the university. A few chairpersons, appointed annually for a year at a time, have what appears to be lifetime tenure. Some departmental faculties operate with almost no participatory democracy.

One veteran departmental chairperson with experience in central administration made these trenchant comments:

> "It seemed to me that the conspicuously undemocratic departments tend to be in the professional schools such as the medical school and agriculture, in particular. The laboratory research people in white smocks often seem uninterested in faculty meetings and committees, preferring to let someone else do it. These are people who strongly supported the concept of the Faculty Senate which relieved them of the responsibility for going to faculty meetings."

Governance Models Reviewed

We based this study on the responses of departmental chairpersons, attempting to learn what their perceptions were of the models of institutional governance in this particular multiversity. Academic deans were the main unit of analysis. Departmental chairpersons have prescribed interactions with the dean and his or her associates; faculty members do interact with the dean, but thier contacts are not regularized. Departmental chairpersons are voted in by their faculty colleagues, but they are appointed by the dean. The chairpersons hold the classic person-in-the-middle role; their academic future is tied firmly to the department, but their ability to represent the department effectively in budgetary and personnel matters is directly related to the quality of their working relationship with the dean. We will show how a detailed qualitative study revealed information about the presence or absence of these four models of governance in the decision-making patterns of academic deans.

Shortly after the data for this study were generated, one of the academic deans offered his resignation after twelve years on the job. In an article printed in the monthly alumni magazine, he made the following statement:

> "Where there is a heavy component of faculty governance, leadership can be difficult. I tried to go slowly, pressing faculty to be aware of factors broader than their own discipline, department or school. Some things simply take awareness. Sometimes you have to let an issue age until there is at least majority acceptance if not widespread or unanimous acceptance.
>
> "Our system doesn't allow for an authoritarian management style, sometimes not even for a very decisive one. It's difficult to be decisive when the entire faculty has to come

> to agreement on a course of action. Leadership becomes compromised."

What better testimonial could one find for the collegial model of academic governance? An ex-dean, experienced in the institution, speaking for the record, has testified that the faculty do rule collectively.

Further affirmation of at least symbolic commitment to collegial governance came indirectly from the departmental chairpersons. When asked if they would like to be a dean, 49 replied in the negative, 2 said they would consider it, and 4 mentioned that they would probably accept the post if offered.

One departmental chairperson described the shortcomings of the role of dean in no uncertain terms:

> "(Emphatically!) NO. Absolutely not. I wouldn't want to be dean. (Motioning with hands crossing out air space and shaking head "no.") I enjoy my research, and I would rather be in the laboratory. I would find worrying about other people's problems not very satisfying. I just cannot imagine why anyone would want to worry about other people's problems."

Content analysis of the interview protocols uncovered the specific statements that the chairpersons made when queried about the possible assumption of the role of academic dean. Some respondents offered reasons why other individuals might like to be dean even though they would not. Tables I and II present this information in tabular form. Positive reasons centered around the opportunity to have influence in shaping the direction of the college, in making changes, and in stimulating growth. Money and power were important, but one-fifth of the respondents stated unequivocally that they failed to discern any

reason for accepting a deanship. Negative reasons emphasized the giving up of teaching and research, the unpleasantness of administration as a way of life, the stress of the job, and the trespass on one's time.

TABLE I

Reasons Offered by Chairpersons for Accepting Deanship

Reasons	Times Mentioned	Percent of Total
1. Opportunity for shaping direction of college	19	38.8
2. Can't think of a reason to do it	10	20.4
3. Power and prestige	9	18.4
4. Increase in salary	8	16.3
5. Advocate of faculty to central administration	2	4.1
6. Meeting and dealing with people	1	2.0
TOTALS	49	100.0

TABLE II

Reasons Offered by Chairpersons for Not Accepting Deanship

Reasons	Times Mentioned	Percent of Total
1. Enjoy research more	18	24.3
2. Like teaching better	17	22.9
3. Dislike administration (paperwork, negotiating)	16	21.6
4. Position too stressful	5	6.8
5. Decisions too difficult	4	5.4
6. Insufficient leadership opportunities	4	5.4
7. Too time-consuming	3	4.1
8. Deal with other people's problems	3	4.1
9. Totally disassociated from discipline	2	2.7
10. Too much politics	2	2.7
TOTALS	74	100.0

Departmental chairpersons did not conceive of the dean as a powerful and bureaucratic administrative figure. The dean was seen as distanced from departmental affairs. One chairperson put it this way:

> "A department is unique. It's somewhat like a family. I don't want to be corny about this; but a department has common goals, a common purpose. The department is where it is at as far as faculty governance is concerned. That's where the bond is. The dean's role diffuses homogeneity of thought. The dean has to be concerned about a variety of interests. The dean becomes totally disassociated from his discipline. I don't know what a dean is. I don't really understand how the office functions."

Over 80 percent of the interview protocols pictured the deans as responding primarily to departmental initiatives. As a veteran chairperson remarked:

> "I've been in this department for twenty years, so I know something about how things are done. The dean's role is largely permissive as far as development of programs or suggesting new ideas for teaching. Of course, he can say "no, it's a bad idea"; but he hardly comes to you and says "here is something I want you to try"; things don't originate in the dean's office."

It is recognized that the dean is not totally impotent. As an astute observer pointed out:

> "The dean exerts most of his influence in departmental affairs by veto power. He controls permission to hire, so if you want to develop a program which he thinks is not a very good idea, he says "no, you can't hire these people." His main positive influence in the department is through his ability to control the budget and space. I don't see our dean as an intellectual leader."

A few chairpersons offered a slightly different attitude. One thoughtful scholar identified what he considered to be the main role conflict for the dean:

> "At times I wish the dean would provide more leadership. For the dean it is sort of a "Catch 22." If he provides leadership, he is going to get resistance; if he doesn't provide leadership, then people will wish he did. I'm not sure how any one individual can resolve that."

As might be expected, this preference for the participatory form of college governance with the dean as a facilitator and provider more than leader is sometimes criticized, particularly when the college or school is losing its image on campus due to weak or incompetent leadership.

While a minority, there are departmental chairpersons who view the situation as strictly bureaucratic masked by the collegial ideology. Here is an example of that point of view:

> "I think there is a kind of lip service to faculty governance; the administration calls all of the shots, and they control the procedures. They control the budget; therefore, they have the power of the purse. We have a bureaucratic structure, and that's the way we're forced to operate, although we do make the initial decisions within the structure, sometimes of our own volition, sometimes as a response to a request from the administration. The power of the purse is absolute. If the dean says there is no money and you can't convince him or her to give you money, then you can't do anything, no matter what you legislate internally."

The political model has its adherents. Some departmental chairpersons are aware of political deviances from the shared governance model. Listen to this respondent:

> "I think that what you have to do in writing up your findings is that you need to focus on the varying definitions that you will have of the term 'faculty governance.' There is a perception that there is something permanent about it, and yet it changes. It changes with the players that you have in power. Faculty governance either is historical or else it's just an abstraction of some sort. What deans have to do is to interpret the meaning of faculty governance. That's one of the biggest problems they have."

One respondent put it succinctly:

> "The departmental chairpersons who scrap the best wind up having the strongest faculty and the greatest amount of money to support research. This is probably counter to the way people think things operate on this campus because it is such a neat environment. But it is not necessarily friendly or uncompetitive by any means. I consider the university to be the most political environment on earth."

Conclusion

With regard to the applicability of a rational model of organization to this university, we must conclude that the glass is only half empty and therefore half full. Theories of organizations as rational die hard in part because the public believes in the rationality of organizational life. The public legitimacy of organizational hierarchy is probably also its greatest source of practical power and efficacy. It is clear in this great university that the classical Weberian principles of bureaucracy do apply in part. Deans do control budgets, they have veto power over appointments, they assign space, they approve proposals, they occupy hierarchical positions; but they do not seem to exercise much personalized and arbitrary rule over faculty members.

We have argued that the alternative models of organizational functioning described at the beginning of this paper, especially the organized anarchy scenario, fasten on the absence of the specific processes assumed in the rational model. However, the rational paradigm is clearly the frame from which these other models emanate. We found traces of all four models of academic governance in this institution.

The collegial model is presumed to be the way things work; all chairpersons made a curtsy to the value of peer decision-making. A few were willing to express that dominant coalitions developed to secure favorable resource allocations. Many recognized that the powerful independent decision-making base of each individual department created a form of anarchy, the survival of the fittest. The unifying force, the glue which held the institution together, was the high research standard, sometimes called the "gold" standard by the respondents.

At least in this one particular institution it seems clear that deans govern in a host of ways, that these models help to dramatize these different approaches. Bureaucratic position enables the determined administrator to orchestrate the rational decision-making model, when appropriate, and to engage in personal rule on occasion; the many informal patterns of friendships, group coalitions, and hidden power plays may arise in political struggles; the strong ideology of the traditional doctrine of freedom in teaching and research supports the principle of collegiality; and the diffuseness promoted by a collection of quasi-autonomous departments discourages integration and enhances anarchy.

The organized anarchy model should be rejected as a descriptor of the governing mechanisms in this institution; this research university is too unified around a common belief in the primacy of research, the administrative structure is abundantly clear, and faculty rules and regulations are well-codified. The political model offers more insight because it recognizes the inevitable conflicts which must be resolved in

even the most collegial of groups--consensus is not always possible and it is necessary to learn how to lose gracefully.

Still, we argue that this university is too complex to fit within the strictures on any one of these governance models. This means that academic deans, in this institution at least, with pretensions to shaping the direction of their college, are faced with a formidable task. This university is no garbage can.

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